

2024 Valley Bible Church Parenting Workshop

Topic 3 Extra Study – Wife’s Role

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Introduction

Today’s marital problems can be traced to the first marital failures and subsequent curses imposed by God on Adam and Eve and their descendants at the Fall from sinlessness. Specifically, problems in marriage stem from the failure to live out the God-designed roles for the husband and wife.

For the wife, Eve failed to follow her husband in respectful submission (Gen 3). She failed to submit to Adam (and ultimately God) and disobeyed God’s word. The curse on Eve and her descendants was a struggle to dominate, master, or enslave her husband.

¹⁶To the woman He said, “I will greatly multiply Your pain in childbirth, In pain you will bring forth children; **Yet your desire will be for your husband**, And he will rule over you.” (Gen 3:16)

⁷If you do well, will not *your countenance* be lifted up? And if you do not do well, **sin is crouching at the door; and its desire is for you, but you must master it.**” (Gen 4:7)

Today we will look at how the wife can honor God in her marriage.

Power to Glorify God

Living a consistently God glorifying life is only possible by “walking in the Spirit” or “being filled with the Spirit.” The Christian life is not lived in one’s own strength. It is a life lived filled with the Spirit as the life of Christ flows through you.

¹⁸And do not get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation, **but be filled with the Spirit**,¹⁹speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody with your heart to the Lord; ²⁰always giving thanks for all things in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God, even the Father; ²¹**and be subject to one another in the fear of Christ.** ²²**Wives, be subject to your own husbands, as to the Lord.** ²³**For the husband is the head of the wife, as Christ also is the head of the church, He Himself being the Savior of the body.** ²⁴**But as the church is subject to Christ, so also the wives ought to be to their husbands in everything.** ²⁵Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her, ²⁶so that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, ²⁷that He might present to Himself the church in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that she would be holy and blameless. ²⁸So husbands ought also to love their own wives as their own bodies. He who loves his own wife loves himself; ²⁹for no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ also *does* the church, ³⁰because we are members of His body. ³¹FOR THIS REASON A MAN SHALL LEAVE HIS FATHER AND MOTHER AND SHALL BE JOINED TO HIS WIFE, AND THE TWO SHALL BECOME ONE FLESH. ³²This mystery is great; but I am speaking with reference to Christ and the church. ³³Nevertheless, each individual among you also is to love his own wife even as himself, **and the wife must see to it that she respects her husband.** (Eph 5:18-33)

In Ephesians 5:18 through 6:9 we see that the results of Spirit filling are:

- God glorifying words (5:19)
- God glorifying heart worship (5:19)
- God glorifying attitudes (5:20)
- God glorifying relationships (5:21-6:9) including marriage relationships

Therefore, the key to a God glorifying marriage is Spirit filling. Let's look at the Spirit-empowered roles (duties) of the wife.

Submission in General

We continue in Ephesians 5:21 looking at Spirit-empowered relationships.

The word “submission” when used in the marriage context is an off-limits topic in some circles. Even among Bible believing Christians, it can seem like an antiquated concept. However, Paul through the Spirit makes it clear that submission in relationships is a key characteristic of Spirit-filled believers.

❖ How does the world view Biblical teaching on marriage? What about you?

The filling of the Spirit (being controlled by the Spirit as the believer forsakes all other masters and bows before the Lord allowing Christ's words to richly dwell within him/her) results in God honoring words (Eph 5:19), worship (Eph 5:19), attitudes (Eph 5:20), and relationships (Eph 5:21+).

¹⁸And do not get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation, **but be filled with the Spirit,**
¹⁹speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody with your heart to the Lord; ²⁰always giving thanks for all things in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God, even the Father; ²¹and **be subject to one another in the fear of Christ.** ... (Eph 5:18-21)

❖ Are you walking consistently in the Spirit?

“Be subject” was originally a military term meaning “to arrange or rank under” or “place under in an orderly fashion”. The main idea is that of relinquishing one's rights to another person. It is a humble attitude of compliance and deference. It is in the present tense and middle voice which calls for a continual subjection that is voluntary or willing.

❖ How is your attitude of submission?

Submission is not a new concept for believers. Spirit-filled believers willingly come under those who God has placed over them. The Scriptures call believers to submit to governing authorities (Rom 13:1-7; 1 Pet 2:13-17), children to parents (Eph 6:1; Col 3:20), the church to its elders (1 Peter 5:1-5; Heb 13:17), employees to employers (Eph 6:5-8; Col 3:22-25), etc.

❖ Do you consider how God would have you to submit in various areas of life?

Here in Ephesians 5:21, we are told that the result of Spirit-filling is a mutual submission. Mutual submission is a characteristic of God-honoring relationships and is typified by regarding others as more important than oneself. We lay aside our rights and humbly serve one another in love.

³Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but **with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves**; ⁴do not *merely* look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others. (Phil 2:3-4)

Yet, this mutual submission between believers does not preclude a hierarchal submission within specific relationships which are dictated by God-designed roles, for example wives to husbands, children to parents, or slaves to masters.

Before we move on to the wife's specific role of submission in marriage, we will look at what the Bible says about gender distinctives. The role of women in the church and home can be one of the most emotionally charged issues in the church.

Gender Equality and Distinctives

Among evangelicals there are two main positions concerning gender and roles in the church:

1) The complementarian view (called the traditional view or hierarchical view by opponents) teaches that God created men and women as equals with distinctive gender-defined roles.

2) The egalitarian view (also called evangelical feminism, biblical feminism, or biblical equality) teaches that God created man and woman fully equal and that true equality demands equal ministry opportunities in the church and equal marital roles in the home.

However, we are not concerned with "positions"; we are concerned with what the Bible teaches. The Scriptures declare that men and women are equal in nature, personhood, dignity, and worth.

²⁷God created man in His own image, **in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.** (Gen 1:27)

In addition, the Scriptures are clear that men and women have equal access to salvation and in terms of their position in Christ as recipients of the gift of saving faith are equal.

²⁶For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. ²⁷For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. ²⁸There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, **there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.** Gal 3:26-28

Throughout the Bible women are equal in the *nature* of their ministry. Women played a prominent role in the ministry of Jesus and ministry to Jesus (Matt 28:1-10; Luke 8:3; 23:49; John 11:1-46; 12:1-8).

No spiritual gift in the lists in the New Testament is limited to men (1 Cor 12:27-31; Rom 12:3-8; 1 Pet 4:8-11). Spirit-filled women allow the words of Christ to richly dwell within them and are empowered with all wisdom to teach and admonish (Col 3:16). Additionally, women are commanded to edify the body of Christ, which included teaching (Titus 2:4) and prophecy (Acts 2:17-18; 21:9; 1 Cor 11:5).

Yet, the Scriptures are clear that within the church and the home, men and women are to function in specifically designed roles. Jesus (Matt 19:3-8) and Paul (1 Tim 2:11-15) both reference the creation account as the foundation for their teaching on gender distinctives. In order to understand the New Testament teaching of gender roles we must first visit the creation account since gender roles are a part of God's original design.

1. Adam was created first then Eve.

¹²But I do not allow a woman to teach or exercise authority over a man, but to remain quiet. ¹³For it was Adam who was first created, *and* then Eve. ¹⁴And *it was* not Adam *who* was deceived, but the woman being deceived, fell into transgression. (1 Tim 2:12-14 cf Gen 2:7)

2. God created Adam directly from the dust, He formed the woman out of the man.

³But I want you to understand that Christ is the head of every man, and the man is the head of a woman, and God is the head of Christ. ... ⁷For a man ought not to have his head covered, since he is the image and glory of God; but the woman is the glory of man. ⁸For man does not originate from woman, but woman from man; (1 Cor 11:3; 7-8 cf Gen 2:21-23)

3. God created the woman for the man.

⁹for indeed man was not created for the woman's sake, but woman for the man's sake. (1 Cor 11:9 cf Gen 2:18)

4. God gave commands to Adam not Eve.

¹⁶The LORD God commanded the man, saying, "From any tree of the garden you may eat freely; ¹⁷but from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat from it you will surely die." (Gen 2:16-17)

5. God named Adam and Adam exercised his God-given leadership in naming Eve.

²³The man said, "This is now bone of my bones, And flesh of my flesh; She shall be called Woman, Because she was taken out of Man." ... ²⁰Now the man called his wife's name Eve, because she was the mother of all the living. (Gen 2:23; 3:20)

6. The gender roles were reversed when Adam followed Eve into sin.

⁶When the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was desirable to make one wise, she took from its fruit and ate; and she gave also to her husband with her, and he ate. (Gen 3:6)

7. After the fall God called out to Adam as responsible, not Eve (even though Eve ate first).

¹²Therefore, just as through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men, because all sinned—(Rom 5:12 cf Gen 3:8-9)

The curse highlighted the new struggle with the original order that men and women would have – male oppression and female rebellion (Gen 3:16; 4:7).

It is clear that the teaching on female submission applied to the church and home has a theological foundation, not cultural.

A God-honoring Wife Submits to Her Husband as to the Lord

With the understanding that God's ordained roles have a theological foundation, we will now look at submission within the family.

Continuing in Ephesians 5, (and looking at the parallel passage in Colossians) Paul goes on to say that the way husbands submit to their wives is through loving, servant leadership and the wife's role in submission is to be subject to her husband as to Christ.

²²Wives, *be subject* to your own husbands, as to the Lord. ²³For the husband is the head of the wife, as Christ also is the head of the church, He Himself *being* the Savior of the body. ²⁴But as the church is subject to Christ, so also the wives *ought to be* to their husbands in everything. (Eph 5:22-24 see also Col 3:18)

❖ **What comes to your mind when you read that you are to be subject to your husband?**

“Subject” does not mean “obedient”. It means to “place under in an orderly fashion”; to set something in place under something else. It refers to two who are equal before God, but one places themselves in subjection to the other. The wife is to subject herself continually (present tense) to her own husband.

The wife makes a choice to place herself as an equal underneath another equal, her husband, in order that there can be order in the family. The purpose is to obey God and function in the design that He has ordered. The wife's submission to the husband is not based on the husband's worthiness, but on God's design (1 Pet 3:1-7; Eph 5:21-33; Col 3:18-19).

❖ **Are you committed to be a doer of God's word?**

Let's look at some aspects of submission.

1. Submission is about submitting to Christ, maintaining Him as first not the husband.

²²Wives, *be subject* to your own husbands, as to the Lord. (Eph 5:22)

¹⁸Wives, be subject to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord. (Col 3:18)

❖ **What do you place above the Lord?**

2. Submission is based on Christ's command not on the husband's worthiness.

²⁴But as the church is subject to Christ, **so also the wives *ought to be* to their husbands in everything.** (Eph 5:24)

❖ **Will you obey God even if you don't feel like it?**

3. Submission honors and glorifies God.

³Older women likewise are to be reverent in their behavior, not malicious gossips nor enslaved to much wine, teaching what is good, ⁴so that they may encourage the young women to love their husbands, to love their children, ⁵*to be* sensible, pure, workers at home, kind, being subject to their own husbands, **so that the word of God will not be dishonored.** (Titus 2:3-5)

❖ **Is the most important thing in your life God's glory?**

4. Submission is to be continual and voluntary or willing (from the Greek) – it is a choice.

²²Wives, *be subject* to your own husbands, as to the Lord. (Eph 5:22)

❖ **What do you hope to accomplish when you choose to not submit to your husband?**

5. Submission is to the wife’s own husband, not to other men.

²²Wives, *be subject* to your own husbands, as to the Lord. (Eph 5:22)

❖ **Do you choose other people’s advise over your husband’s wishes?**

6. Submission trusts God.

⁵For in this way in former times the holy women also, who hoped in God, used to adorn themselves, being submissive to their own husbands; ⁶just as Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord, and you have become her children if you do what is right without being frightened by any fear. (1 Pet 3:5-6)

❖ **Will you trust God enough to submit?**

7. Submission manifests itself in continual respect, treating with esteem.

³³Nevertheless, each individual among you also is to love his own wife even as himself, and the wife must *see to it* that she respects her husband. (Eph 5:33)

❖ **What is your respect for your husband based on?**

8. Submission is all encompassing (with the next exception).

²⁴But as the church is subject to Christ, so also the wives *ought to be* to their husbands in everything. (Eph 5:24)

❖ **Are there limitations on your submission?**

9. Submission obeys God before the husband.

¹⁸Wives, be subject to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord. (Col 3:18)

²⁹But Peter and the apostles answered, “We must obey God rather than men. (Acts 5:29)

Examples of things where the wife would not submit to her husband because it would be disobeying the Lord:

- participating in evil (Eph 5:11-12)
- not gathering with other believers [but be careful] (Heb 10:25)
- not teaching children about God (Eph 6:1-4)
- committing immorality (1 Cor 6:20)
- lying or cheating (Eph 4:25).

In some cases, it will be necessary to simply say “no” (Dan 3); in other cases the example of Daniel’ creative obedience (Dan 1) can be applied.

10. Submission is still having something important to say.

¹⁶Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms *and* hymns *and* spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God. (Col 3:16)

²⁶She opens her mouth in wisdom, And the teaching of kindness is on her tongue. (Prov 31:26)

⁸Hear, my son, your father's instruction And do not forsake your mother's teaching; (Prov 1:8)

❖ **Do you strive to use wisdom in your speech?**

11. Submission is influencing her husband in a Biblical way.

– Filled with the Spirit

¹⁶Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms *and* hymns *and* spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God. (Col 3:16)

¹⁸And do not get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation, but be filled with the Spirit, ¹⁹speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody with your heart to the Lord; (Eph 5:18-19)

❖ Are you walking in the Spirit?

– With behavior that speaks louder than words

¹In the same way, you wives, be submissive to your own husbands so that even if any *of them* are disobedient to the word, they may be won without a word by the behavior of their wives, ²as they observe your chaste and respectful behavior.

³Your adornment must not be *merely* external—braiding the hair, and wearing gold jewelry, or putting on dresses; ⁴but *let it be* the hidden person of the heart, with the imperishable quality of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is precious in the sight of God. (1 Peter 3:1-4)

❖ **Does your behavior lead your words or the other way around?**

– With peace and goodness

¹⁷Never pay back evil for evil to anyone. Respect what is right in the sight of all men. ¹⁸If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men. ¹⁹Never take your own revenge, beloved, but leave room for the wrath *of God*, for it is written, “Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,” says the Lord. ²⁰“But if your enemy is hungry, feed him, and if he is thirsty, give him a drink; for in so doing you will heap burning coals on his head.” ²¹Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good. (Rom 12:17-21)

❖ **Is your heart vengeful?**

– With God honoring speech

¹⁹It is better to live in a desert land Than with a contentious and vexing woman.
(Prov 21:19 see also Prov 21:9; 25:24; 27:15-16)

¹A gentle answer turns away wrath, But a harsh word stirs up anger. (Prov 15:1)

²¹The wise in heart will be called understanding, And sweetness of speech
increases persuasiveness. (Prov 16:21)

¹⁵but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all *aspects* into Him who is
the head, *even* Christ, (Eph 4:15)

❖ Do you keep your tongue under control?

Only as a wife bows before the Lord, being Spirit-filled can she honor Him in submission to her husband. She submits to her Lord first, then to her husband because God designed the family to function in this way. She submits and leaves the results to God. Ultimately, submitting to her husband requires trust in God.

A God-honoring Wife Cultivates Fondness for Her Husband

When we think of “love” in the Bible, we most often think of “agape” love – the sacrificial commitment of my will to another’s needs and best interests regardless of the cost to myself. All believers are commanded to love one another.

¹²“This is My commandment, that you love one another, just as I have loved you. (John 15:12)

¹¹Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. ¹²No one has seen God at any time; if we love one another, God abides in us, and His love is perfected in us. (1 John 4:11-12)

❖ Do you give of yourself sacrificially even to those who are not lovely?

Just as the husband is to love his wife, the wife is to sacrificially serve her husband. Yet there is another kind of “love”.

³Older women likewise are to be reverent in their behavior, not malicious gossips nor enslaved to much wine, teaching what is good, ⁴so that they may **encourage the young women to love their husbands, to love their children, ⁵to be sensible, pure, workers at home, kind, being subject to their own husbands**, so that the word of God will not be dishonored. (Titus 2:3-5)

“Young” and “old” is most likely determined by children rearing age. A woman still raising children is considered “young”; if she is finished raising children, she is considered “old”.

“Love their husbands” means to be “friend of husband” or “fond of husband”. It has the idea of holding dear in a close bond of personal affection. It is in the present tense and active voice. Wives are to be continually fond of their husbands. The active voice signifies that the wife is to exhibit a willing determined love that is not based on a husband’s worthiness but on God’s instructions for order in the home.

Another way to say this is to be “devoted” to your husband. The husband should be the wife’s primary human relationship and vice versa. The wife’s goal is her husband’s benefit, not her own. She is to put her husband’s welfare before her own.

¹⁰An excellent wife, who can find? For her worth is far above jewels. ¹¹The heart of her husband trusts in her, And he will have no lack of gain. ¹²She does him good and not evil All the days of her life. (Prov 31:10-12)

❖ **Are you fond of your husband? Are you devoted to your husband?**

Why might it be important for young women to be continually devoted to their husbands?

A God-honoring Wife has the Home as the Priority

Among conservative Christians there tends to be a “Leave it to Beaver” mindset regarding the wife’s role in the home. This is perpetuated by culture and preconceptions read into certain Bible passages. Unfortunately, many distort Scripture to fit their own stereotypes.

³Older women likewise are to be reverent in their behavior, not malicious gossips nor enslaved to much wine, teaching what is good, ⁴so that they may encourage the young women to love their husbands, to love their children, ⁵*to be* sensible, pure, **workers at home, kind**, being subject to their own husbands, so that the word of God will not be dishonored. (Titus 2:3-5)

“Workers at home” means to be devoted to home duties, preoccupied with domestic affairs. The idea is that she is caring for the home and a producer of orderliness and care in the home. A similar command is given in 1 Timothy:

¹⁴Therefore, I want younger *widows* to get married, bear children, **keep house**, *and* give the enemy no occasion for reproach; (1 Tim 5:14)

The Scriptures are clear that a wife is to be a “worker at home” or “keep house”. This does not mean that she cannot work outside the home. In fact, the godly wife/mother portrayed in Proverbs 31:10-31 adds to her family’s resources through hard work in and outside the home. Being a “worker at home” simply means that a godly wife’s primary responsibility is to the family.

❖ **To what are you devoted?**

The Christ-Like Wife of a Non-Believing Husband

There are several ways a Christian wife may find herself married to an unbeliever: she comes to Christ after they are married, she marries a professing believer who later denies Christ, or she was immature or rebellious when she married an unbeliever. Regardless, the Scriptures speak to this.

If the unbelieving husband consents to remain in the marriage, then the believing wife should remain married. She must not “endure” the marriage, but strive on her part to glorify God in the marriage. Her husband and children are in a special place to not only hear the gospel, but to see it in action.

¹²But to the rest I say, not the Lord, that if any brother has a wife who is an unbeliever, and she consents to live with him, he must not divorce her. ¹³And a woman who has an unbelieving husband, and he consents to live with her, she must not send her husband away. ¹⁴For the unbelieving husband is sanctified through his wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified through her believing husband; for otherwise your children are unclean, but now they are holy. (1 Cor 7:12-14)

❖ **Are you striving to glorify God in your marriage?**

Live the gospel. The most intimate of human relationship is a place which allows the gospel to shine in the most magnificent ways.

¹In the same way, you wives, be submissive to your own husbands so that even if any *of them* are disobedient to the word, they may be won without a word by the behavior of their wives, ²as they observe your chaste and respectful behavior. (1 Pet 3:1-2)

The most effective ministry to a husband who is “disobedient to the word” (could mean believers or unbelievers) is his wife’s behavior. Therefore, the wife should strive to grow in her relationship with Christ.

❖ **Are you striving to grow in your relationship with Christ?**

Pray for your husband and have others pray for you (but be careful).

¹Brethren, my heart’s desire and my prayer to God for them is for *their* salvation. (Rom 10:1)

²Devote yourselves to prayer, keeping alert in it with *an attitude of* thanksgiving;
³praying at the same time for us as well, that God will open up to us a door for the word, so that we may speak forth the mystery of Christ, for which I have also been imprisoned;
⁴that I may make it clear in the way I ought to speak. (Col 4:2-4)

❖ **What might happen if you tell your Christians friends all about your unbelieving husband?**

Conclusion

The godly wife is first and foremost submitted to God, bowed before Him, and filled with the Spirit. This will change her interaction with her husband and glorify God in her marriage relationship.

She is a woman who submits to her husband because God calls her to. She responds to her husband respectfully and strives to have a heart attitude of fondness toward him. Her primary responsibility is the family.

If a woman’s relationship with the Lord does not thrive, her marriage will not thrive.

The Wife's Role – Additional Study

Read Ephesians 5:18-33 and Colossians 3:16-18 asking God to show you ways in which you are not submitting to your husband. Note them here:

What would be a way to honor God in each of those situations?

Read the entire book of Titus then read again Titus 2:3-5, in what ways do you show your husband fondness? Brainstorm, asking God to show you, other ways you could demonstrate fondness.

Read Proverbs 31:10-31 below. Underline all the ways in which the excellent wife serves her family. How could you be more like this excellent wife?

¹⁰An excellent wife, who can find? For her worth is far above jewels.

¹¹The heart of her husband trusts in her, And he will have no lack of gain.

¹²She does him good and not evil All the days of her life.

¹³She looks for wool and flax And works with her hands in delight.

¹⁴She is like merchant ships; She brings her food from afar.

¹⁵She rises also while it is still night And gives food to her household And portions to her maidens.

¹⁶She considers a field and buys it; From her earnings she plants a vineyard.

¹⁷She girds herself with strength And makes her arms strong.

¹⁸She senses that her gain is good; Her lamp does not go out at night.

¹⁹She stretches out her hands to the distaff, And her hands grasp the spindle.

²⁰She extends her hand to the poor, And she stretches out her hands to the needy.

²¹She is not afraid of the snow for her household, For all her household are clothed with scarlet.

²²She makes coverings for herself; Her clothing is fine linen and purple.

²³Her husband is known in the gates, When he sits among the elders of the land.

²⁴She makes linen garments and sells *them*, And supplies belts to the tradesmen.

²⁵Strength and dignity are her clothing, And she smiles at the future.

²⁶She opens her mouth in wisdom, And the teaching of kindness is on her tongue.

²⁷She looks well to the ways of her household, And does not eat the bread of idleness.

²⁸Her children rise up and bless her; Her husband *also*, and he praises her, *saying*:

²⁹“Many daughters have done nobly, But you excel them all.”

³⁰Charm is deceitful and beauty is vain, *But* a woman who fears the LORD, she shall be praised.

³¹Give her the product of her hands, And let her works praise her in the gates.